

Furor at the CIA over Tower report

Did NSC influence intelligence estimate to justify arms sale?

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The Central Intelligence Agency is in an uproar over the findings of the Tower Commission report on the Iran-contra affair.

Some present and former officials argue that the commission's report incorrectly implies that the agency manipulated intelligence data for political purposes.

An agency official says that senior intelligence officers are "furious" over the report.

They are also concerned that the kind of vigorous give-and-take between government agencies that encourages sound intelligence reporting will be inhibited in the future because of the panel's findings.

One of the CIA officials named in the Tower report, Graham Fuller, the vice-chairman of the high-level National Intelligence Council, is leaving the agency at the end of the year. Although Mr. Fuller was unavailable for comment, another CIA official said his departure has "absolutely nothing to do" with the Tower Commission report.

Fuller is the principal author of the Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) that was used by the National Security Council (NSC) to justify covert arms sales to Iran.

Fuller consulted with NSC offi-

The report said that a National Security Directive Decision "drawing on" the SNIE sanctioned the arms sales. William Casey, then the CIA director, supported the finding.

The Tower Commission report has sharply divided experts in American intelligence gathering.

"There's quite a bit there," says one analyst, adding, "The whole question of altering intelligence data for political purposes certainly bears looking into."

But others disagree. One Washington-based analyst says the Tower Commission failed to understand the normal give-and-take that goes into preparations of CIA reports, and wrongly concluded that discussions between officials of different agencies was improper manipulation of the intelligence-gathering process.

CIA deputy director Robert Gates this month wrote to Sen. David Boren (D) of Oklahoma, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, to "set the record straight on several false allegations."

One such allegation, he said, was that "CIA colluded with NSC officials in preparation of the May 1985 [SNIE] on Iran to reach specific conclusions."

Gates wrote that the NSC was "not involved in drafting nor was it allowed to participate in the interagency coordination of the draft. . . . The independence and integrity of the intelligence process were preserved throughout."

The Tower report indicates that an NSC official, Donald Fortier, boasted in a May 28, 1985, note that "we also just got a bootleg copy of the draft SNIE."

Fortier noted that that "we worked fully with Graham Fuller on the approach, and I think it really is one of the best yet."

Some critics have taken that as evidence of political manipulation, since it was the NSC that originally requested the special estimate in order to back up its plans for arms sales.

Others, however, say that intelligence analysts fail when they do not consult with those who set policy.

"There's nothing wrong with that," says one former intelligence official. "You've got to talk to the policy people in order to get the context. It's hard for me to see that's a perversion of the process."

Admiral Stansfield Turner, formerly the director of the CIA, says there is a "fine line" between lively interchange and improper manipulation. While "you want to encourage contact" between analysts in various branches, he says, "you don't want to encourage the NSC to believe they've got a national intelligence estimate when they really haven't."

Robert J. Murray, a consultant to the Tower Commission and director of the national security program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, says, "I would hope no one would draw the conclusion from the Tower Commission report that CIA and policy makers should not interact vigorously. . . . Normal interaction is important. If you can't have it, you do no good service to policymaking."

"I think it's quite proper for the NSC to try to lash the bureaucracy to produce the best intelligence information," Murray says. But he concludes, "I think it's improper for the NSC to tell people what the conclusions ought to be."



cials as he was writing the document, a fact that came under critical scrutiny in the Tower Commission report. Excerpts from the SNIE, as well as parts of Fuller's own testimony to the commission, were quoted at length in the report.